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Parks and Public Playgrounds

THE RECORD OF A YEAR'S ADVANCE

A SYMPOSIUM

CHICAGO

By HUGO S. GROSSER, Esq., City Statistician, Chicago, Ill.

Although the park system of Chicago is almost as old as the city itself, its growth has in no way kept pace with the growth of the city, and to-day the great city of Chicago, with its area of 190 square miles, has a total park area of only 2,463 acres, a smaller area per capita of the population than that of any other of the larger cities in this country.

Chicago's first park was established in 1839, two years after the incorporation of the city, and consisted of one-half a square on the lake front, extending to Michigan avenue. During the next thirty years additions were made to the park system by the gift of small areas throughout the city, and there were ultimately some forty-four public and private parks in existence when the first systematic plan was inaugurated for the establishment of Chicago's park system. Chicago's parks are not under the jurisdiction of the city government, but are governed by three different park boards, created through acts of the state legislature from 1869 to 1871. The Lincoln Park Commissioners are in charge of Lincoln Park—which had been established by the abolition of a cemetery as early as 1860, while the rest of that park was made from sand wastes and swamps—and the boulevard system and smaller parks on the north side of the city; the West Chicago Park Commissioners rule over the parks on the west side, namely, Douglas, Humboldt and Garfield Parks, while the South Park Commissioners are in charge of the park area on the south side of the city, the largest parks of which are Washington and Jackson Parks. The first two commissions are appointed by the governor of the state, while the South Park Commissioners are elected by the judges of Cook County. These park boards are absolutely independent of any other governing body, and levy their own taxes. For many years it has been sought to do away with this multiplicity of taxing bodies, and in a constitutional amendment adopted by the people in 1904 provision was made for a consolidation, but as yet the state legislature has not passed any law to carry into effect this provision.

Besides the parks controlled by these three park boards, the city of Chicago, through its Department of Public Works, has jurisdiction over some thirty-six small park spaces and triangular plots at street intersections. Some

of these have been transferred to the control of the park boards. The expense for the maintenance and improvement of the so-called "city" parks is met by annual appropriation of the city council. The boulevard system in connection with the chain of parks, which is being extended from year to year, is also in charge of the various park boards, the original cost of construction being defrayed by special assessment on the abutting property, while the cost of their maintenance comes out of the general park and boulevard taxes.

A few years ago Chicago experienced an awakening to its park deficiencies, due to the efforts of the Special Park Commission to obtain small parks and playgrounds in the congested districts of the city. This commission is appointed by the mayor, and consists of nine aldermen and six citizens. By means of a series of bills passed by the General Assembly in 1901, 1903 and 1905, the three park boards mentioned have received authority to issue \$11,000,000 in bonds for various park and playground extension plans. This vast sum is divided among the park boards as follows: Half a million dollars for small parks and playgrounds in the densely populated portions of the north side; one million dollars for the extension of Lincoln Park by reclaiming 215 acres of submerged land along the lake shore; one million dollars for small parks and playgrounds on the west side; two million dollars for the general improvement of the large parks on the west side, which have been allowed to fall into a state of decay through the ruling hand of the politicians, mismanagement and extravagance in keeping a useless pay roll; one million dollars for small parks and playgrounds, not exceeding ten acres, on the south side; three million dollars for the completion of Grant Park on the lake front and the creation of larger parks than ten acres on the south side; two million five hundred dollars for the completion and improvement of, and additions to the larger park system on the south side. Since 1901 fifteen new parks have been acquired, ranging in area from six and a half to three hundred and twenty-two acres, and aggregating seven hundred acres, not included in the area quoted above. These are scattered over the great south side from Twenty-fifth to One Hundred and Thirteenth street, and from Central Park avenue to Lake Michigan. The land has cost one million eight hundred thousand dollars, and the improvements thus far two million five hundred and seventy-five dollars.

The Lincoln Park extension work is in progress, but no start has been made to acquire the small parks on account of indifference on the part of the park board, masked behind legal technicalities. The West Park Board pursued a masterly policy of inaction as to small parks for several years, and when defects were discovered in their act, a new one was passed last winter. With a reconstructed board of business men, a fresh start will be made this winter to get the much needed small parks, after a vote is taken on the bond issue at the November election.

The most interesting side of this park extension on the south side is its social and educational aspect. Each new park has, or will have when finished, as its central feature, a field house or neighborhood center, comprising in each case a well equipped gymnasium for men and boys, another for women and girls, shower and plunge baths for each sex, a reading room, a lunch counter,

two or three small club rooms, and a large assembly hall. Adjacent to each central building are a band stand, with surrounding seats, broad concrete walks, and spaces for roller skating, out-door gymnasiums for men, women and children, all in separate sections, a large swimming pool with showers and dressing-rooms. The public library board has arranged to establish branch libraries in several of these buildings. Each park is also equipped with athletic fields for ball games, a skating area and place for toboggan slides.

These are not the only plans for extending the park system of Chicago, and a far more ambitious scheme is being agitated at present. Last December the Special Park Commission issued an elaborate, illustrated report, suggesting a scheme for a metropolitan, or outer belt park system in city and county, following the scheme of the Boston Metropolitan Park Commission. It is proposed to acquire a chain of city and country park areas, mostly natural wooded lands and banks of rivers and lakes, aggregating 37,000 acres. A bill providing for the organization of a forest preserve district was passed by the last legislature, and the question will be voted upon at the November election. The proposed district comprises nearly all of Cook County. The commission is to be appointed by the governor, and will have authority to issue bonds to the extent of four million three hundred and sixty thousand dollars without a referendum, and thirteen million dollars after getting a referendum vote of the people. The commission will also be authorized to raise about four hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars a year for maintenance.

There are now nine municipal playgrounds—three on each side of the city—in thickly populated districts, which are all in charge of the Special Park Commission. The funds for these playgrounds are obtained from the city council's annual appropriation, or by private contributions of land, money and equipment. In some cases the land had been previously owned by the city, in others the free use had been given for a fixed period, or until the site is sold, so that there is no security of tenure except in three playgrounds. Miscellaneous apparatus is provided for children of all ages, open fields for baseball, football, basket ball, running and jumping; besides cinder tracks, shower bath house and skating ponds, provided at each ground where the area is sufficient. Lack of funds has prevented the city from equipping its playgrounds in the elaborate manner described as to the south side small parks, yet more than one million children and young men and women visited the playgrounds last year. The Merchants' Club has provided a fund each year with which prizes are purchased and awarded to young athletes in competitive sports, and to younger children excelling in raffia weaving and other handiwork during the summer vacation. The city maintains a general director of athletics and gymnastics, who also acts as superintendent, besides a director at each ground, women kindergartners for the children during the summer vacation. Track teams, teams for baseball, football and basket ball are organized among the boys at the various grounds, and high-class games are played with outside teams. The commission provides free uniforms for the baseball and football teams.

Several sites have been secured on the west and north sides of the city for playgrounds, but are waiting for equipment funds. The commission has

just issued an appeal to the public, asking for donations of money and land and setting forth the need for more playgrounds, especially on the west side.

In addition to the municipal playgrounds, there are half a dozen playgrounds conducted as philanthropic enterprises by social settlements and other organizations. The Roman Catholic Church people have also established several playgrounds in connection with their parochial schools.

The question of public baths has, during the last few years, received considerable attention on the part of the city authorities. At present the city has under contract for completion within a few months, or in operation, twelve municipal bath houses, scattered throughout the city in the poorer districts. They are under the control of the Department of Health, as are also three bathing beaches along the lake shore. These municipal bath houses, seven of which were in operation in 1904, were in that year attended by 650,000 persons, and the Department of Health expended for their maintenance and operation the sum of \$23,519.24. A bathing beach is also maintained at Lincoln Park.

BUFFALO

By PROF. A. C. RICHARDSON, Buffalo, N. Y.

Buffalo established its first municipal playground in the summer of 1901, using for that purpose a part of the park system known as The Terrace, which is situated in the midst of a densely populated district downtown. This playground is under the charge of the Park Commissioners, while the others are managed by the Department of Public Works. Three additional playgrounds were established in 1902 and two more in 1903, so that there are now six. Their areas are as follows:

Terrace Park	57,600 sq. ft.
Johnson Street	73,392 "
Broadway Market	72,820 "
Hamburg Canal	106,730 "
Bird Avenue	45,011 "
Sidway Street	46,900 "
Total	402,453 "

All these grounds are on city property except that on Sidway street, for which, only a nominal rent is paid, consisting of the current taxes on it. The Bird avenue ground has the great advantage of being located next to a public school, which of course is the ideal location, as the basement of the school furnishes room for the storage of apparatus and for shower baths, which are an indispensable adjunct. Shelter houses have been erected for these purposes on all the other grounds.

The annual appropriation for the maintenance of these grounds is between

\$11,000 and \$12,000, which includes the salaries of two directors for each ground. These twelve directors compose the Playground Association, and meet weekly to file reports of the attendance and games played, and to regulate in general the policy of the playgrounds. There should be, and probably at some time will be, a general director to supervise all the grounds and see that the various employees do their work properly. The grounds are open from about the first of June to some time in November, and the average monthly attendance in 1903-04 was 130,770. For three years past an annual inter-playground meet, known as the Buffalo Civic Games has been held, at which gold, silver and bronze medals were awarded to the successful competitors; but this year each playground had its own separate meet instead.

The equipment of the Bird Avenue ground, which is typical of them all and will serve to indicate the nature of the games played, is as follows: Cinder track, horizontal bars, trapeze, swings (16), testers, jumping ground, basket-ball courts (2), hand-ball court, sand boxes, babies' swings and May-poles.

The following extract from a report made to the Charity Organization Society by its Committee on Municipal Playgrounds in 1903, will serve to indicate the nature of the effect produced upon the immediate neighborhood by the opening of a playground. The conversations quoted are vouched for as actual occurrences:

"The improvement in playground districts has been marked. The immediate neighbors, usually at first hostile, soon became warm friends of the playground. A sense of community of interest grows up. On returning a stolen bat a small boy replied to the director's questioning, "Well, you see, Mister, I thought I was stealing it from you, but when I thought it over I knowed it belonged to all the boys as well as me; dat's why I brought it back." Crap-shooting, never permitted on the playgrounds, has nearly disappeared from their vicinity. Large numbers of boys have been induced by the directors to quit cigarette smoking, as not conducive to athletic attainments. Two years ago a prominent west-side woman, who owned some houses on the east side, found on inspecting her property, that the windows were not broken as they had been other years. She made inquiry as to the reason for the change, and learned that a playground had shortly before been established in the neighborhood. Since then she has made strong pleas for playgrounds before the aldermen. A boy on the playground pointing to a portly policeman, said, "Dere goes old Battles, de cop. He won't arrest us any more now, as youse's got a playground for us kids. De playground is good for him as well as us." "How's that," asked the director. "Why can't ye see, old Battles used to be thin as er match when he chased us kids, but now he's big as er barrel 'cause he ain't got no work to do."

Public Baths.

The following extracts from official reports of the Health Department furnish a complete history of the municipal baths of Buffalo. (Monthly Report, April, 1900):

"In the winter of 1894-95, a sub-committee of the Buffalo Charity Organization Society, which, through personal investigation of the tenement house districts, became familiar with the fundamental principles which underlie the need of poor families that lack home conveniences, and of the working classes that require bathing facilities as a common decency of life, took under consideration the question of establishing a free municipal bath house. This committee was composed of Dr. John H. Pryor, William A. Douglas, and Williams Lansing, assisted by the Health Commissioner. Its members, on more than one occasion, aided and sustained those entrusted with the administration of the laws affecting public health, and through the united efforts of this committee and the Department of Health, the proposition was brought before the Common Council, and advanced to a stage where the establishment of a free public bath by the municipality was an assured fact, and just as the provisions became favorable, and the necessary point attained, the State Legislature enacted the subjoined measure entitled 'An Act to Establish Free Public Baths in Cities, Villages and Towns.'"

Chapter 351—Laws of New York State, 1895. Section 1.—"All cities of the first and second class shall establish and maintain such number of public baths as the local board of health may determine to be necessary; each bath shall be kept open not less than fourteen hours for each day, and both hot and cold water shall be provided. The erection and maintenance of river or ocean baths shall not be deemed a compliance with the requirements of this section. Any city, village or town having less than 50,000 inhabitants may establish and maintain free public baths, and any city, village or town may loan its credit or may appropriate of its funds for the purpose of establishing such free public baths."

"The constitution of the State of New York recognizes cities of the first class as having a population of 250,000 or over; cities of the second class 50,000 or more, but less than 250,000; and cities of the third class less than 50,000. Money was now appropriated, plans were ordered, site selected, contracts let, and ordinances providing for attendants and management passed, so that by January 1, 1897, the first absolutely free municipal bath house in the world was established, completed in every detail and put into full and successful operation. It is officially known as Public Bath House No. 1. It is not only free, but open on every day in the year from 7 a. m. to 9 p. m., excepting on Sundays and holidays, when those requiring a bath must observe the hours from 7 to 10 a. m. There is absolutely no charge for its use, no restrictive classification of users, soap and towels are gratuitous, with an unlimited supply of water, both hot and cold, the only restriction imposed being, necessarily, one of time, namely, that bathers cannot occupy an apartment longer than twenty minutes. Additionally, facilities are afforded to wash and dry underclothing, so that the equipment of the establishment sends forth those which patronize it cleansed both in person and clothing. This is at variance with the customs that prevail at the European municipal bath houses where, in every instance, for equal bathing facilities, a fee is demanded.

"This bath is located in Police Precinct No. 1, which has an area of only

0.86 square miles or about 2 per cent. of the entire area of Buffalo, yet, according to the police census of 1895, it has a population of 20,587 or six per cent. of the entire population, and this, notwithstanding the fact that a very large portion of the precinct is taken up by railroad tracks, the Terrace, canal docks, depots, public buildings, stores and manufacturing establishments.

TABLE OF BATHS GIVEN.

YEAR.	1897.	1898.	1899.	1900.	1901.	1902.	1903.	1904.
Bath House No. 1 .. Opened Jan. 1, 1897.	76,873	79,381	81,793	86,795	89,112	77,675	78,343	77,051
Bath House No. 2 .. Opened Jan. 2, 1901.	.....	.....	.....	.....	145,143	115,975	108,281	117,523

COST AND MAINTENANCE—PUBLIC BATH HOUSES NOS. 1 AND 2.

	No. 1.	No. 2.
Cost of land	\$6,500.00	\$2,600.00
Cost of building	8,000.00	15,000.19
Cost of equipment	300.00	563.40
	<u>\$14,800.00</u>	<u>\$18,163.59</u>
Salary of keeper	\$500.00	\$500.00
Salary of matron	400.00	400.00
Salary of assistant keeper	480.00	480.00
Salary of firemen, two, each \$600 .....	.....	1,200.00
Coal and wood	¹ 1,100.00	2,050.03
Furnishing and laundrying towels	380.79	567.52
Soap	233.22	275.52
Incidentals	21.22	119.31
	<u>\$3,115.23</u>	<u>\$5,592.38</u>
Credit by waste soap returned	33.06	32.58
	<u>\$3,082.17</u>	<u>\$5,559.80</u>

The popularity of these aids to sanitation is very evident from the tables of baths given. In fact, so popular are they, that they are inadequate to fill the demands made upon them, and provision should be made, in the very near future, for at least one additional bath house."

The facilities for *out-door* bathing in summer in Buffalo are not good. Owing to shortsightedness in the past the lake shore is now accessible in but

¹ Estimated steam furnished No. 1 by Municipal Building.

very few spots, and these can be reached only after crossing railroad tracks. At two of them, however, the city maintains cheap wooden dressing-rooms under the charge of a caretaker, who rents soap, towels and bathing trunks for a small fee. The contemplated changes in the water supply system, however, include plans for an outdoor swimming pool similar to that now in use at Erie, Pa. But it is probable that this will not be constructed for several years.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

By **GEORGE S. WILSON, ESQ.**, Secretary Board of Charities of the District of Columbia.

There is no material change in the park system proper in the District of Columbia since my notes of last year. Considerable progress has been made, however, in the effort to develop public playgrounds in the small parks and in the yards of the public school buildings. For three years the effort to conduct public playgrounds was carried on by a volunteer committee without aid from the public treasury. Last year official endorsement was given to the movement to the extent of an appropriation of \$3,500—\$1,500 for the equipment of public playgrounds in school yards and \$2,000 for playgrounds not connected with public schools. The major portion of the burden, however, was still borne by private contributions.

The playground movement was first started in Washington in the summer of 1903, and during that summer six playgrounds were maintained; in 1904 eleven were in operation, and in 1905 nineteen were maintained. Of the nineteen maintained during the past year eleven were in public school yards and eight on public reservations and vacant lots. A trained supervisor, Dr. Henry S. Curtis, of New York City, was employed for six months to direct the work. His time was occupied largely in selecting and training kindergartners and athletic directors, whom the committee found it necessary to provide for the proper supervision of the work. The committee seems now to be convinced that public playgrounds cannot be made successful without competent directors. They look upon a playground without a director as being almost as bad as a school without a teacher.

Much greater interest was shown in the movement during the past summer than during the preceding years. Athletic contests were held throughout the summer at the various grounds and between representatives from the different grounds, and at the end of the season, on September 8 and 9, field days were held. The successful contestants in these final events received medals,—gold medals for first prizes, silver medals for second, and bronze medals for third. A banner was given to each winning team, and a special prize banner, the gift of one of the local newspapers, was presented to the team winning the largest total number of points. Separate playgrounds were conducted for white and for colored children, and separate field days were held. The local committee now feels that the importance of the playground movement has been sufficiently demonstrated to warrant generous appro-

priation of public funds for its maintenance, and an effort will be made this winter to secure from Congress a larger appropriation for the maintenance of the work. An effort will also be made to secure funds to purchase and equip one small park playground. It is the policy of the committee to urge upon the city the acquisition of small parks to be used as playgrounds in the various crowded sections, and they are urging an appropriation this winter for the first of such playgrounds, which they hope to make a model and use as an argument for the acquirement of others.

SEATTLE

By PROF. J. ALLEN SMITH, University of Washington, Seattle.

The first step looking toward the acquisition of land for park purposes was taken by the municipal authorities of Seattle in 1884. Little was done, however, during the following decade, and not until about 1897 did the need for public parks begin to receive serious consideration. Since this date the city has purchased three tracts of land—Woodland Park, containing 196 acres; Washington Park, with an area of 128 acres, and City Park, of 125 acres. Woodland Park, situated in the northern part of the city, is a beautiful piece of property; having a frontage of over half a mile on Green Lake. Washington Park, which is situated in the east central part of the city, extends for more than a mile along the shore of Lake Washington. City Park is just outside of the city limits, and is at present unimproved. The municipal authorities have also acquired through gift or purchase several smaller pieces of property in various parts of the city.

A plan for the improvement and extension of the present park system, prepared by a well-known landscape architect of Massachusetts, is now being carried out under the direction of the municipal board of park commissioners. The plan adopted contemplates the preservation of some remnants of the original forest which fortunately have not been destroyed. It will also utilize the unusual advantages which Seattle possesses in the abundance, variety and magnificence of its views of lake, sound and snow-capped mountains.

The campus of the University of Washington should also be mentioned in connection with the Seattle park system. It contains 355 acres, a large portion of which is in the original forest state. It lies between Lake Washington and Lake Union, having a water frontage of more than a mile on the former and about a quarter of a mile on the latter. It is within the city limits, and, though belonging to the state, is virtually a part of the municipal park system.

During the last two or three years there has been a marked growth of sentiment in favor of providing suitable means of recreation for the pupils of the public schools. Several of the schools now have teeters, swings, horizontal bars, basket ball and tennis courts, etc. The scheme of recreation and amusement also includes a garden on or near the school grounds, which is cared for by the children.

DULUTH

By W. G. JOERNS, Esq., Duluth, Minn.

In the earlier days Duluth was provided with only such public parks as had been reserved and dedicated to public use in the several plats of the city's subdivisions. These were mostly in the nature of public squares, except a few larger dedications in suburban plats, and had remained almost wholly unimproved. It was in the latter eighties that a broader scope and systematic development of Duluth's park system was agitated and inaugurated. The prime figure in this movement was Mr. W. K. Rogers, who was better known to the general public as the one-time private secretary of President Hayes. Mr. Rogers had come to Duluth and took a deep interest in its development. He recognized its wonderful natural beauties and the unusual possibilities for the development of a substantial and beautiful park system. He was the leader and the hardest worker in the movement for the creation of this park system, and to his enthusiasm and great effort was largely due the fact that the system, as it exists to-day, was finally established. Mr. Rogers became the first president of the first park board of Duluth.

Six hundred feet above the level of Lake Superior, along the brow of the hills surrounding Duluth, the remains of an ancient beach form a natural roadway which connects numerous small water courses and deep gorges and ravines, and all, extending over a distance of some seven miles or more, have been acquired by the city and are now a part of the park system of Duluth, and form one of the most beautiful natural drives in the world. The city expended in the purchase and improvement of this particular part of its park system approximately three hundred thousand dollars, and this sum forms a part of its present bonded indebtedness.

The control of the parks and parkways of the city is vested in a Board of Park Commissioners of five members, who are appointed by the Mayor, subject to confirmation by the District Court. The president of the park board is ex-officio a member of the City Conference Committee. The members serve without pay. The park fund is provided by annual tax levy and has been running at about \$10,000 a year. An increase of approximately \$5,000 was made for the coming year to provide means for the acquirement of additional park property.

The public parks of Duluth are well distributed throughout the different sections of the city, are well taken care of and are extensively used by the public. In the improvement of the same the aim has been observed to retain, as much as possible, the natural scenic beauties. Some of the smaller squares have been made into beautiful flower gardens. The park board has also taken charge of the planting of trees in public streets, under direction of the Common Council, and in the course of the past ten years the general beauty of the city has been thereby much improved. Some of the public squares have been devoted to recreation purposes as playgrounds, and in winter as skating rinks; but Duluth has as yet neither public baths nor gymnasia.